

Message Text

SECRET

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 KABUL 8123

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E. O. 11652: XGDS 1
TAGS: PFOR, AF, US, UR
SUBJECT: U.S. POLICY AS THE AFGHAN SUCCESSION APPROACHES

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT DAOUD HAS EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE ABILITY OF HIS COUNTRY TO WITHSTAND SOVIET PRESSURES AFTER HE LEAVES THE SCENE. HE HAS ASKED THAT THE USG WARN THE USSR TO KEEP ITS HANDS OFF AFGHANISTAN. END SUMMARY

2. THE ISSUE OF AFGHANISTAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION, WHICH IS MORE FUNDAMENTALLY THE QUESTION OF AFGHANISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE, HAS COME TO THE FORE IN THE COURSE OF THE CURRENT JOCKEYING, REPORTED ELSEWHERE, FOR THE EVENTUAL SUCCESSION TO PRESIDENT DAOUD. THIS IS NOT SURPRISING, BECAUSE THOUGHTFUL AFGHANS, EVEN MORE THAN CONCERNED FOREIGNERS, ARE NERVOUS ABOUT THEIR COUNTRY'S ABILITY TO WITHSTAND SOVIET PRESSURES IN THE WAKE OF DAOUD'S DEPARTURE FROM THE SCENE.

3. IT HAS BEEN A CONSTANT THEME OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS OF DAOUD'S BROTHER AND KEY FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISER, MOHAMMAD NAIM, THAT AFGHANISTAN NEEDS AN ACTIVE AND VISIBLE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN ORDER TO BUTTRESS AFGHAN INDEPENDENCE. THIS THEME HAS BEEN FREQUENTLY REPEATED BY FOREIGN MINISTER ABDULLAH AND DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER GHAUS. WHAT IS NEW IS THAT FOR THE FIRST
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TIME I AM HEARING THIS THEME FROM DAOUD HIMSELF.

4. WHEN I TOOK SENATOR SCOTT TO SEE DAOUD ON NOVEMBER 14, DAOUD COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE EXPLICIT (KABUL 7984) IN REFERRING TO HIS SATISFACTION THAT AMERICAN MILITARY POWER MIGHT BE AVAILABLE (AS SENATOR SCOTT HAD IMPLIED) TO HELP SMALL NATIONS (READ AFGHANISTAN) DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST AGGRESSORS

(READ USSR). THAT SAME EVENING, I HAD A LONG PRIVATE TALK WITH ABDULLAH AND GHAUS WHO WANTED ME TO KNOW THAT DAOUD'S REMARK TO SCOTT INDICATED DAOUD'S CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET INTENTIONS HERE AND HIS DESIRE FOR MORE AMERICAN SUPPORT. ABDULLAH AND GHAUS SAID THEY HAD BEEN ASKED BY DAOUD TO TALK TO ME ALONG THESE LINES. THEY SAID THEY WERE INCREASINGLY WORRIED ABOUT THE SOVIETS, CLEARLY INDICATING THEY FEEL THE SOVIETS MIGHT TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AN AFGHAN SUCCESSION CRISIS. THEY PRESSED ME TO CONSIDER NEW WAYS IN WHICH THE U.S. COULD LEND SUPPORT TO AFGHANISTAN. THEY ASKED THAT WE URGE OTHER COUNTRIES, MENTIONING THE U.K., GERMANY, JAPAN, SAUDI ARABIA, AND IRAN, TO DO MORE FOR AFGHANISTAN.

5. COMMENT: AT THIS POINT I SHOULD POINT OUT THAT I DO NOT THINK THIS IS A PLOY TO USE THE SOVIET THREAT TO GET MORE ECONOMIC AID FROM US. I THINK DAOUD'S AND HIS ASSOCIATES' CONCERNS ARE GENUINE AND ARE RELATED TO THE IMMINENCE -- CERTAINLY WITHIN A FEW YEARS AT MOST -- OF HIS STEPPING DOWN FROM THE AFGHAN HELM. END COMMENT.

6. I TOLD ABDULLAH AND GHAUS THAT THEY KNOW WELL WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT DO IN OUR AID AND OTHER BILATERAL PROGRAMS. I SAID IT HAS BEEN AND WOULD CONTINUE TO BE MY PRACTICE TO LET THEM KNOW WHAT WE CAN DO, SO THAT THEY CAN CHOOSE WHAT FITS THE AFGHAN SITUATION, AND TO KEEP THEM INFORMED IF I FIND U.S. PROGRAMS HERE RUNNING INTO AFGHAN ROADBLOCKS WHICH DO NOT APPEAR
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TO TAKE POLITICAL FACTORS INTO ACCOUNT. I THEN SAID I THOUGHT DAOUD'S VISIT NEXT YEAR TO THE U.S. WOULD SERVE BETTER THAN ANYTHING ELSE OUR MUTUAL PURPOSE TO SHOW VISIBLE U.S. SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN.

7. AT THIS POINT ABDULLAH, WITH GHAUS CHIMING IN, MADE A STRONG PLEA THAT WE MAKE KNOWN DIRECTLY TO THE SOVIETS OUR INTEREST IN AFGHAN INDEPENDENCE. THAT, THEY SAID, WOULD BE BY FAR THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEASURE WE COULD TAKE TO ASSIST AFGHANISTAN IN THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD. I MADE A NONCOMMITTAL REPLY.

8. COMMENT: I AM CONVINCED, AS NOTED ABOVE, THAT THIS PLEA COMES FROM DAOUD AND THAT IT IS GENUINE. I AM STRUCK, TOO, BY THE URGENCY IN ABDULLAH'S AND GHAUS' APPROACH; THEY MAY BELIEVE THE SUCCESSION CRISIS WILL REACH A CLIMAX FAIRLY SOON. AS ABDULLAH HAS SEVERAL TIMES STRESSED TO ME, THE MATTER OF MAINTAINING AFGHAN INDEPENDENCE IN THE FACE OF CONTINUOUS SOVIET PRESSURES IS THE COUNTRY'S PARAMOUNT CONCERN. BECAUSE AFGHANISTAN IS A LAND-LOCKED COUNTRY, SHARING A 1,200 MILE BORDER WITH THE USSR, AND HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON THE SOVIETS FOR TRADE AND ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID, IT MUST ACCOMMODATE THE SOVIETS TO A CERTAIN EXTENT.

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9. BUT IN ORDER TO SET LIMITS ON SOVIET INFLUENCE, THE AFGHAN LEADERSHIP BELIEVES IT NEEDS MORE VISIBLE SUPPORT FROM US. ABDULLAH TOLD ME THAT, DURING DAOUD'S LAST VISIT TO MOSCOW IN APRIL 1977, BREZHNEV HAD COMPLAINED ABOUT AMERICAN AID PROJECTS IN NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN, AND DAOUD HAD PEREMPTORILY LEFT THE ROOM. THIS WAS TO SAY THAT DAOUD CAN AND WILL STAND UP TO THE SOVIETS, BUT THAT HE CAN DO SO BETTER IF THE SOVIETS ARE AWARE OF OUR INTEREST IN AFGHAN INDEPENDENCE.

10. ALL OF THE ABOVE RELATES TO THE LOOMING QUESTION OF SUCCESSION. DAOUD IS 68 AND SEEMINGLY IN GOOD HEALTH, BUT HIS AGE IS VERY ADVANCED FOR AN AFGHAN, AND WE KNOW HE IS SLOWING DOWN. WHILE HIS PRESIDENTIAL TERM HAS ANOTHER FIVE YEARS TO RUN, IT IS MOOT WHETHER HE WILL FINISH IT OUT. HIS AGE AND THE AFGHAN HISTORY OF COUPS AND ASSASSINATIONS AGAINST CHIEFS OF STATE DO NOT AUGUR WELL FOR A PREDICTABLE, ORDERLY TRANSITION. WHILE THE NEW CONSTITUTION, PROMULGATED EARLIER THIS YEAR, CALLS FOR THE SUMMONING OF A SPECIAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO CHOOSE THE PRESIDENT, IN THE EVENT OF DEATH OR THE END OF A SIX-YEAR PRESIDENTIAL TERM, DAOUD AND OTHERS ARE UNDER NO ILLUSION THAT THIS WILL GUARANTEE A QUICK, PEACEFUL SUCCESSION. IN ANY POWER STRUGGLE, THERE EXISTS THE LATENT THREAT THAT THE SOVIETS WILL BACK ONE OF THE CONTESTANTS. HENCE, THE DESIRE OF DAOUD AND ABDULLAH THAT THE USG POINTEDLY NOTIFY THE SOVIETS TO KEEP THEIR HANDS OFF. THE AFGHANS BELIEVE THE U.S. THE ONLY COUNTRY WITH THE CLOUT TO
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DO THIS WITH ANY EFFECTIVENESS.

11. WHETHER THE SOVIETS WOULD INTEREFERE HERE IN THE EVENT OF A DOMESTIC AFGHAN CRISIS IS OF COURSE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. THEY DID NOT DO SO IN THE FIVE TIMES SINCE 1917 WHEN THERE HAVE BEEN ABRUPT CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT, BUT THEN NONE OF THE CONTENDERS SOUGHT SOVIET HELP, AND THE USSR WAS NOT AS STRONG AS IT IS NOW. THE USSR'S ACTIONS IN ANGOLA AND ETHIPIA SUGGEST THAT THE USSR IS NOT AVERSE TO MEDDLING IN DOMESTIC POLITICS OF WEAK COUNTRIES. WE CANNOT ABSOLUTELY RULE OUT A PROTRACTED SUCCESSION STRUGGLE SUCH AS HAPPENED IN 1928-29, WHICH WOULD PLAY INTO SOVIET HANDS AND PERMIT THEM, FOR EXAMPLE, TO USE WHATEVER ASSETS THEY HAVE IN THE LARGELY SOVIET-TRAINED AND EQUIPPED ARMED FORCES.

12. AT THE SAME TIME, WE AND OUR ALLIES DETECT VERY LITTLE PRO-SOVIET SENTIMENT IN AFGHANISTAN. IN FACT, IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF AFGHANS ARE ANTI-SOVIET. WHILE ATINY, SEMI-CLANDESTINE, PRO-SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY EXISTS, THE CHANCES OF ITS PREVAILING POLITICALLY ARE REMOTE. NONE OF THE LIKELY CONTENDERS TO SUCCEED DAOUD IS BELIEVED TO BE EITHER PRO-SOVIET OR MORE THAN MILDLY SOCIALIST.

13. A SITUATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT OR TEMPT THE SOVIETS TO INTERFERE IN AFGHANISTAN WOULD, IN MY VIEW, BE CLEARLY INIMICAL TO OUR INTEREST IN THE STABILITY OF THIS PART OF THE WORLD. IT WOULD CREATE A CRISIS ATMOSPHERE INVOLVING IRAN, CHINA, PAKISTAN, INDIA AND INEVITABLY OURSELVES. IT SEEMS TO ME TO BE PLAINLY IN OUR INTEREST, THEREFORE, TO MAKE CLEAR THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO THE INDEPENDENCE OF AFGHANISTAN AND TO CONTINUE TO ASSIST THE FORCES WITHIN AFGHANISTAN, LED NOW BY DAOUD, THAT STAND FOR AN INDEPENDENT NATIONALIST AFGHANISTAN.

14. I SHOULD ADD HERE THAT I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY OF TELLING
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ABDULLAH AND GHAUS THAT THE ONE MATTER WHICH COULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE U.S. ABILITY TO ASSIST AFGHANISTAN IS THE OPIUM PROBLEM. THEY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT, ALBEIT WITH NO GREAT PLEASURE.

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15. SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO? OUR ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE BEING SLIGHTLY INCREASED, AND THIS WILL HELP THE AFGHANS SOMEWHAT, BUT NOT VERY VISIBLY. WE CONTINUE, WITH SOME RESULTS, TO URGE LIKE-MINDED COUNTRIES TO INCREASE THEIR PRESENCE HERE TOO.

16. MORE USEFUL, HOWEVER, IN AFGHAN EYES ARE RECIPROCAL VISITS BY TOP-RANKING AFGHAN AND U.S. OFFICIALS, AND USG STATEMENTS SUPPORTING AFGHAN INDEPENDENCE. PRESIDENT DAOUD'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON NEXT YEAR WILL CERTAINLY HELP, AS ATULD ALSO A CONSCIOUS POLICY ON OUR PART FOR THE PRESIDENT, SECRETARY VANCE, AND OTHER HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS, AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO STOP IN KABUL IN TRIPS THROUGH THIS AREA. DAOUD'S INVITATION TO PRESIDENT CARTER TO STOP IN KABUL WAS MOTIVATED, I AM SURE, WITH MOSCOW IN MIND.

17. RECOMMENDATION: AS REGARDS USG STATEMENTS, THERE ARE TWO ALTERNATIVE WAYS WE CAN HELP THE AFGHANS IN THE WAY OF A WARNING DIRECTED TO THE SOVIETS. ONE WOULD BE FOR PRESIDENT CARTER, DURING THE DAOUD VISIT TO WASHINGTON NEXT SUMMER, TO INCLUDE IN A PUBLIC STATEMENT OR COMMUNIQUE A REFERENCE TO OUR SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN INDEPENDENCE. THE OTHER WAY WOULD BE FOR SECRETARY VANCE TO INFORM SOVIET AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN CLEARLY AND POINTEDLY IN SOME BILATERAL CONVERSATION, PERHAPS IN AN INDIAN OCEAN CONTEXT, THAT WE EXPECT THE SOVIETS TO KEEP THEIR HANDS OFF AFGHANISTAN.

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18. I HOPE ONE OR BOTH OF OUR TWO ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS CAN BE ADOPTED. IF WE MAKE A STATEMENT AND THEN PROCEED WITH OTHER BOLSTERING PROGRAMS HERE, SUCH AS SCHEDULING VISITS TO KABUL, SOMEWHAT INCREASING OUR AID AND MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAMS, AND ENCOURAGING OUR ALLIES TO MAINTAIN A VISIBLE INTEREST, I THINK THESE ACTIONS WILL GO FAR TO HELP US REALIZE OUR GOALS HERE AND BE WARMLY APPRECIATED TOO BY THE AFGHANS.
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